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AUTHOR Krepel, Thomas L.; And Others  
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## ABSTRACT

Proceedings of a symposium of professors of educational administration that focused on concerns about the Bush Administration's six national educational goals are described in this paper. Attention was given to policy, measurement, and research implications. Policy concerns include the objectives' exclusionary development process, lack of a clear problem statement, the representation of simultaneous centralization and decentralization of education, and violation of traditional policy models. Measurement problems of the objectives involve a lack of coordination among educational groups, reliability and validity, lack of consensus on a conceptual model, failure to utilize a broad approach, cost, links to allocation decisions, reporting and interpretation, the subject population, and poorly defined standards of performance. A major implication for research is that most reforms have failed due to the lack of a sound research base before implementation; another obstacle is funding. A conclusion is that the educational community of educational administration professors must be involved in defining and implementing national educational goals. (20 references) (LMI)

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THE NATIONAL GOALS FOR EDUCATION:  
CHALLENGES IN POLICY, MEASUREMENT, AND RESEARCH

A Symposium  
Conducted At The  
45th Annual Conference  
Of The  
National Council Of Professors Of  
Educational Administration

Thomas L. Krepel  
St. Cloud State University

Marilyn L. Grady  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Kevin S. McGrew  
National Center on Educational Outcomes

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Thomas L. Krepel, Ph.D.  
St. Cloud State University

Marilyn L. Grady, Ph.D.  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Kevin S. McGrew, Ph.D.  
National Center on Educational Outcomes

Throughout the 1980s, American public education was the subject of intense and unrelenting criticism. Motivated in part by an increasingly competitive international environment, leaders at all levels in the United States expressed concerns and issued proposals for change in the nation's system of public elementary and secondary education. Despite nearly a decade of criticism and analysis, little substantive change in American education appears to have occurred as the 1990s began (Cuban, 1990a; Futrell, 1989).

The lack of change in the nation's system of schooling has been frequently attributed to the absence of commonly accepted goals for education, as well as structural impediments presented by dissimilarities in the fifty state systems of public education (Cuban, 1990b; Timar, 1989). In response to the barriers to educational reform and restructuring, President Bush convened the nation's governors for an education summit in the fall of 1989.

Subsequent meetings of the governors occurred during the spring of 1990. The purpose of the education summit and meetings was to develop goals for American elementary and secondary education. In early 1991, six National Goals for Education (NGE) were presented by the governors.

Despite the endorsement of the NGE by the governors and subsequent acceptance by the Bush administration, individual states have been left to decide on the implementation of the Goals. Follow-on activities have been undertaken by both the Bush administration and the National Governors' Association to develop strategies for implementation of and assessment of progress toward accomplishment of the Goals (Alexander, 1991; National Governors' Association, 1990a, 1990b).

The motivations, processes, and implementation strategies associated with the National Goals for Education raise many significant questions about policy, measurement, and research. Unfortunately, the debate on the NGE is confined by the lack of empirical evidence used to formulate and promote the goals, or to assess the relevance of the Goals to state, school district, and school site needs. Recognizing both the political nature of the National Goals for Education and the speed with which they were identified and sanctioned, discussion of the Goals must proceed for now without the benefit of field observations and empirical evidence. However, educators and policy makers are challenged to

engage in critical analysis of the Goals and their implications for the organization and delivery of education in America. The purpose of this symposium is to initiate and focus a discussion on the following three topics:

- I. Policy implications of the National Goals for Education, including issues of education policy agenda-setting, simultaneous centralization and decentralization of education, the emerging and appropriate federal role in elementary and secondary education, and models of policy and analysis of the National Goals for Education;
- II. Measurement implications of the National Goals for Education, including issues of measurability, adequacy of current data bases for assessing progress, and review of current efforts to develop assessment mechanisms; and
- III. Research implications of the National Goals for Education.

#### I. Policy Implications of the National Goals for Education

The substantial policy implications of the National Goals for Education can be summarized by and discussed within the context of the following three generalizations:

1. The National Goals for Education represent a new dimension in education policy agenda setting.

The NGE manifest an unprecedented combined presence of the executive branches of the federal and state governments in defining the outcomes of American education. Traditionally, education has been thought of in the United States as a state responsibility locally administered. Since the end of World War II, and especially as a result of such issues as racial desegregation and equity in state financial support of schools,

education has been a public policy arena dominated by state legislative activism.

In terms of both content and development, the National Goals for Education represent a dramatic departure from established policy processes and structures. The presence of the President of the United States and the governors of the fifty states in the NGE process represents both a significant redefinition of the role of the federal government, and a substantially more activist role on the part of the governors in elementary and secondary education policy making (Herbers, 1991).

Executive branch activism in education policy making, as represented by the National Goals for Education, differs markedly from past involvement of the President and the governors in several respects. First, gubernatorial involvement in education in the 1980s was marked by individual efforts in the respective states (e.g., Alexander in Tennessee, Clinton in Arkansas). Second, gubernatorial involvement in education policy making has tended to emphasize inputs as the measure of support and accomplishment. Third, education policy tended to be made in response to identified issues within states. The National Goals for Education, however, suggest a unified and coordinated approach by the governors, a shift to emphasis on the outputs of elementary and secondary education systems, and a narrowing of

focus and motivation to education's role in economic competitiveness.

Reading of the documents in which the National Goals for Education were presented by the governors (National Governors' Association, 1990a) and endorsed by the President (Alexander, 1991), suggest a fundamental change in or redirection of the purpose of American elementary and secondary education. The rationale offered throughout the documents for the National Goals for Education emphasizes workplace performance of American workers and international economic competitiveness. Although these considerations have been present in previous conceptualizations of American education, seldom if ever have they been given exclusive emphasis as with the National Goals for Education.

The seemingly narrow focus and tone of the National Goals for Education reflect the process used to initiate and formulate the Goals. From the beginning, the process of development for the NGE has been exclusionary, selective, and void of a clear and documented problem statement. Participation in the education summit, conducted in the fall of 1989 at the initiative of President Bush, was limited to the nation's governors. The governors were challenged by the President to articulate goals for American education. Approximately six months after the

education summit the governors produced the six National Goals for Education (National Governors' Association, 1990a).

Substantial concern and criticism has been expressed about the process associated with both the initiation and formulation of the National Goals for Education. A commonly expressed concern has related to the absence of involvement of federal or state legislators or members of the education community in the identification of the National Goals for Education. Concerns about the exclusive processes associated with the NGE have been compounded by the Bush Administration's reliance upon national business leaders to assume leadership in implementation of the Goals.

Regardless of the merit of the criticisms expressed about the initiation, formulation, and implementation processes associated with the National Goals for Education, the lack of a clear, well documented, and agreed upon problem statement stands as a remarkable characteristic of the Goals. In the absence of such documentation, understanding and interpretation of the Goals becomes difficult. For example, the reader of the documents in which the Nation's Goals for Education were proposed (National Governors' Association, 1990a) or strategies for implementing the Goals were suggested (Alexander, 1991), is not informed about why the particular Goals were identified and not others, the geographic or demographic distribution of whatever problems the



Goals are intended to address, or why particular implementation strategies have been selected and not others.

The National Goals for Education represent a new dimension in education policy agenda setting. The Goals represent unprecedented executive branch activism in education. The Goals suggest a potential shift in the fundamental purposes of American public elementary and secondary education. The Goals and related implementation strategies have been formulated through processes that have tended to exclude rather than expand participation. And, the Goals represent a major departure from tradition and established policy without the benefit of evidence that identifies the problems they are intended to address. A major, lingering, unanswered question relates to the need for National Goals for Education.

**2. The National Goals for Education represent simultaneous centralization and decentralization of American education.**

The evolution of the education reform movement of the 1980s has fostered a contemporary environment conducive to the decentralization of schooling. For example, many states and local school districts are considering or have adopted organizational restructuring strategies that include site based management, empowerment of teachers and parents, expanded community involvement in the schools, increased client and consumer choice in schooling options, and deregulation of the bureaucratic structures of education. In such an environment,

actions that tend to centralize and promote uniformity in education seem incongruent.

The National Goals for Education suggest a centralization of education policy and practice. As noted earlier, the NGE demonstrate a new era in executive branch activism in education policy setting. However, the National Goals for Education manifest other significant centralization characteristics. For example, the Bush Administration (Alexander, 1991) and the nation's governors (National Governors' Association, 1990b) have suggested that progress toward the National Goals for Education be measured uniformly throughout the United States and that progress toward the Goals be used to decide how and to what extent resources are allocated to local education agencies. As a result, the National Goals for Education represent a remarkable departure from the traditional practice of American education being the sum of the efforts of fifty independent, state based education systems.

The National Goals for Education further represent a centralization of education policy and practice in relation to authority and responsibility. Resources for education have traditionally been provided through and in response to a combination of state and local efforts. Although the NGE do not necessarily change this relationship, the Goals do superimpose a new set of performance criteria that were defined without the

participation of traditional policy actors, namely legislators and education professionals.

Because of the process used to define the National Goals for Education, many questions have emerged. Among the questions yet to be addressed are why the specific curricular areas identified within the NGE were selected, who will inherit the on-going operation of the "New American Schools" suggested in the Goals' implementation strategy documents (Alexander, 1991), how schools will respond to issues identified within the National Goals for Education over which they have little control (e.g., drug use), and how were the "New World Standards" referred to in the Bush Administration implementation documents determined? Of course, even the suggestion of "New World Standards" for education manifests centralization thinking on the grandest scale because one must ask what the "Old World Standards" were that are being replaced?

**3. The initiation, formulation, adoption, and implementation processes associated with the National Goals for Education appear to violate the conventions of established policy models.**

Beyond the many practical questions and issues raised by the content and processes associated with the National Goals for Education, numerous academic issues are also implied by the Goals. As the Goals come under greater empirical scrutiny, existing theoretical models of policy making (e.g., elite [Dye & Zeigler, 1981], game [Radford, 1981], group equilibrium [Truman,

1951], incremental [Lindblom, 1959], rational [Dror, 1968], or systems [Easton, 1965]) may be found inadequate for explaining the National Goals for Education.

A cursory review of traditional models of policy making suggests that each model is deficient in fully explaining the motivations, the participant pool, or the content of the National Goals for Education, or in predicting the outcomes of the NGE. For example, a rational model of policy making does not explain the lack of a supporting basis of information that defines the nature and extent of the policy problem the Goals are intended to address. As a result, alternative models of policy making (e.g., arena [Mazzoni, 1991] or ecology of games [Firestone, 1991]) will need to be further developed and applied to efforts to understand and explain the initiation, formulation, and content of the National Goals for Education.

Because the National Goals for Education developed so quickly, through such a seemingly closed process, and with so very little empirical justification, scholars of public and education policy are challenged to understand fully the Goals phenomenon. A need exists to better understand the motivations of the participants in the NGE process. Further, empirical evidence is needed through which the initiation, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation of the National Goals for Education can be explained.

## II. Measurement Implications of the National Goals for Education

In the original report of the governors in which the National Goals for Education were presented (National Governors' Association, 1990a), it was recommended that, "a bipartisan group (be formed) to oversee the process of determining and developing appropriate measurements and reporting on the progress toward meeting the goals," (p. 39). Based upon the governors' recommendation, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) was formed and has been working on the many assessment and measurement related issues raised by the National Goals for Education. As with the policy implications of the NGE, the Goals present daunting challenges to both practice and theory. This portion of the symposium presents a number of observations and related comments regarding the many assessment and measurement issues associated with the National Goals for Education.

**1. Efforts to assess and measure progress toward the National Goals for Education, especially those of the National Education Goals Panel, need to be viewed within a broader range of education assessment and measurement activities.**

The NEGP is but one activity within a larger context of the current educational indicators movement. Extensive educational assessment and indicator development activity is occurring under the auspices of many groups, including, but not limited to, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Center for Educational Outcomes (NCEO), the National Education Statistics Agenda Committee (NESAC), the Special Study Panel on Education Indicators, and the National Center for Education

Statistics (NCES). Although there is some overlap in membership among these groups and activities, there is little overall coordination of effort in the educational indicators movement.

**2. Assessment of progress toward the National Goals for Education raises important questions of validity and reliability.**

The language used in the National Goals for Education presents challenges in definition which, in turn, raise challenges of measurement. For example, the education community will be challenged to define such terms and concepts as 'readiness to learn', 'high school completion', and 'adult literacy'. Definitions applied to such terms will have a major impact on the technical adequacy of the measures used to assess progress toward the National Goals for Education.

Once the definitional challenges are addressed, the education community will then confront the issue of reliability and validity of measures. A major concern regarding reliability will involve uniformity of the measures. Of course, uniform, national measures of educational outcomes have significant policy implications. The technical issues associated with reliability were concisely summarized by the National Education Statistics Agenda Committee (1990) when they noted, "applying nonstandard and hence, inconsistent definitions to data across locales poses the greatest potential threat to the reliability of national statistical reports" (p. 12).

**3. Assessment of progress toward the National Goals for Education will be hampered by the lack of consensus on a conceptual model.**

In order to gather information that will help answer the important questions raised today, as well as in the future, an overriding conceptual framework is needed to guide NGE assessment activities. Currently, the education community lacks agreement on a model of an optimally functioning educational system. As a result, it will be difficult to identify what is 'good educational health' and to define a road map on how to attain such a state. The current NEGP activities are not grounded in any overriding model, and could result in the development of measurement strategies ill-suited to the information needs of the future. Although there is no consensus on a generic model, a number of useful conceptualizations are available (e.g., NESAC, 1990; Special Study Panel on Education Indicators, 1991) and should receive greater consideration in the current NGE activities.

**4. Given the diversity and magnitude of interests affected by measurement of progress toward the National Goals for Education, it is important that a broad versus narrow approach to measurement be used.**

Measurement of educational achievement and progress is currently criticized for a narrow focus on readily available data, rather than more appropriate, broad-range indicators. As a result of the fast pace of the NGE activities, sufficient time has not been provided for the development of measurement strategies that focus on more than educational achievement. The current fast pace has



resulted in a narrow focus on scores from standardized tests, a situation that raises the concern that the current 'high stakes' environment may result in an inappropriate narrowing of the school curriculum. The Special Study Panel on Education Indicators (1991) has noted, for example, that, "indicators should address enduring issues. We should assess what we think is important, not settle for what we can measure" (p. 19).

**5. Adequate attention has not been given to the cost implications of measuring progress toward the National Goals for Education.**

In an era of near gridlock of the federal and state governments' ability to commit resources to new or expanded activities, a significant issue relates to the question of how much such assessment systems will cost and who will be responsible for those costs. Even if public policy makers choose to commit resources to measurement, there is a likelihood, because of revenue constraints and deficits, that those resources will come from other education functions. The Special Study Panel on Education Indicators (1991) addressed this issue when it observed, "a reliable system of indicators cannot be created with the spare change and free time left over after 'more basic' service needs have been met. The time has to be allocated and the money budgeted" (p.48).

**6. Measurement of progress toward the National Goals for Education will involve very 'high stakes' testing and assessment.**

Results of assessments of progress toward the National Goals for Education may be used for making resource allocation decisions to



schools/ and school districts by the federal and state governments. Previous experience with high stakes assessment at the local and state levels has clearly documented the negative effects on obtaining accurate data when there is pressure exerted through sanctions or financial rewards or punishments. By making progress toward the NGE such a 'high stakes' endeavor through the reporting of disaggregated results at the state or local levels, policy makers are enhancing the probability that indicators of educational achievement will be corrupted. Particular attention will need to be paid to resolving this major threat to any assessment and measurement system developed in response to the National Goals for Education.

**7. Reporting and interpretation of assessment of progress toward the National Goals for Education to the public and policy makers will be a major challenge.**

Much of the existing educational indicator work is incomprehensible to the nonexpert in testing, measurement, and assessment. Given the scope of the current NGE activities, there is a strong chance that the public will be overwhelmed by hundreds of pieces of unrelated data (Special Study Panel on Education Indicators, 1991). In addition, attention needs to be devoted to interpreting the data in the appropriate contexts, as different states and school districts differ on many characteristics (e.g., socio-economic status) that have a demonstrated impact on educational progress. While the public and policy makers will need to be given results that can be appropriately interpreted and applied, efforts will need to be

made to produce more than numbers and charts. Opportunities will need to be made available for critical analysis, reflection, thoughtful commentary, and application of results of assessments of progress toward the National Goals for Education.

**8. Decisions must be made regarding the inclusivity of subjects in National Goals for Education assessment structures.**

Current systems for assessing educational progress tend to exclude or ignore significant portions of the school-age population of the United States. For example, the National Center for Education Outcomes estimates that forty to fifty percent of all students with disabilities are currently excluded from the most prominent national data collection programs (e.g., National Assessment of Educational Progress) that are being used to monitor educational attainment (McGrew, Thurlow, Spiegel, and Shriner, in press). A major question needing to be addressed in the NGE debate involves the issue of which students will be included and which students will be excluded from assessments of progress toward the Goals. This is important as 'who' and 'what' we measure conveys important messages about who and what are valued by our society.

**9. Even if all other technical issues related to assessment and measurement of progress toward the National Goals for Education can be resolved, a difficult challenge will remain in defining standards of performance.**

Strenuous debate resulting in little agreement has characterized past attempts to define national standards in specific disciplines. For example, the National Assessment Governing

Board, which oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress, has encountered a number of technical and political problems in defining uniformly endorsed standards of performance in mathematics. The National Goals for Education intensify the importance and visibility of this issue by making reference to "first in the world" standards and levels of accomplishment for American students in the areas of science and mathematics (National Governors' Association, 1990a). Implicit in the rhetoric of the NGE from both the nation's governors and the Bush Administration is a presumption that the United States can unilaterally define "New World Standards" (Alexander, 1991) of educational performance.

**10. The contemporary debate over the kind of data that should be used to measure educational achievement should be resolved before assessment systems for gauging progress toward the National Goals for Education are put into place.**

Currently available indicators provide only quantitative measures of educational achievement. Not only will consideration need to be given to whether and what qualitative assessment strategies (e.g., performance measures) are to be used, but appropriate measures of student performance in the noncognitive areas identified in the National Goals for Education will need to be devised. The inclusion of alternative assessment strategies and measures of noncognitive performance raise, of course, many challenging questions, including the subjectivity of the assessment, and the time and cost requirements of such assessment techniques.

**11. The education community will need to be on guard that measurement of progress toward the National Goals for Education will not be mistaken for reform and improvement.**

Experience suggests that attempts to measure outcomes have resulted in a redirection of attention from educational process and content to test procedures and results. Should the same phenomenon occur as a result of assessment systems designed to measure progress toward the NGE, the Goals could exacerbate the very problems they are purported to address. Just as the measurement of a person's body temperature cannot reduce a fever, simple measuring and reporting of assessment results cannot, by itself, produce better educational achievement. Measurement by itself cannot be the sole mechanism or outcome of educational reform.

**12. Policy makers and educators should strive to become more familiar with existing data systems that provide indicators of educational performance.**

Many high quality and current education data systems are maintained by the federal and state governments, professional organizations, and research institutions. Additional data systems are being regularly created. The proliferation of education data systems could contribute to conflicting, contradictory reports and analyses that, in turn, could confuse and bewilder citizens and policy makers alike. A need exists for better coordinated education data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting processes. Any assessment system intended to measure progress toward the National Goals for Education should be carefully evaluated in regard to its

potential to contribute to further confusion about educational performance. In addition, those seriously interested in the monitoring of educational reform need to become more fluent in an emerging language sprinkled with NAEPs, NELs, NAGBs, NESACs, NCEOs, to name but a few acronyms that are emerging in this area. The special reports by NESAC (1990) and the Special Study Panel on Education Indicators (1991) are required reading for those seriously interested in becoming more familiar with much of the current thinking on the development of educational indicators by which to monitor our national education progress.

### III. Research Implications of the National Goals for Education

Michael Kirst in Voices from the Field (1991) offers a number of cogent observations concerning the research implications of the National Goals for Education. According to Kirst (1991), the President's proposal (America 2000) is oriented more toward the delivery of technical assistance to stimulate random innovation than toward an effort to improve education through a carefully designed research program.

A review of education improvement efforts suggests that these reforms failed due to a lack of a sound research base. Kirst notes that the current NGE initiative appears long on development and short on a research strategy to identify comparative effectiveness and affordability for different education models.

Kirst enumerates seven unanswered research and evaluation issues related to the National Goals for Education. These are:

1. To what extent is the program directed at the same outcomes and trying to demonstrate the efficacy of different strategies to reach the same end?
2. How will a careful investigation be conducted of the stages of implementation needed to achieve substantial change?
3. To what extent will there be different demonstrations tailored to specific subgroups of pupils, such as limited English speaking or disadvantaged?
4. How will causation be attributed from the multiple interventions the new models embody?
5. What are appropriate indicators of success?
6. To what extent will each model have a 'program theory' detailing the processes by which change is to occur and the assumptions about causal links?
7. How will the likely variation in outcomes and implementation be handled?

Research imperatives for the successful implementation of the NGE include the development of a systematic knowledge base established over time and under varying circumstances. This knowledge base will serve as the basis for longitudinal experiments that provide documentation of the achievement of the Goals. Additionally, this data base will afford the opportunity for replication studies and identification of the long-term impact of the NGE on pupils.

Additional research issues suggested by the NGE include the empirical testing and validation of existing theoretical and conceptual models of educational policy making. Such studies may

lead to the revision of existing models as well as the formulation of new theoretical and conceptual models of educational policy initiation, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation.

An overarching concern relative to the NGE is the lack of funding to support the development of a research base. Funding is not provided for intensive and comprehensive experimentation. Although federal seed money may be available to support aspects of the program, funding has not been identified for research support. Private resources may be available to stimulate innovation. Private resources, however, likely will not be available for comprehensive or long-term research studies.

Without the resources to support research, the National Goals for Education and America 2000 may join the ranks of earlier aborted education reforms. Without measures of causation, indicators of success, verifiable practices, and evidence of outcomes, the NGE initiative likely will be another random innovation in American elementary and secondary education.

### Conclusion

The National Goals for Education have the potential for substantially realigning the education landscape of the United States. The NGE represent a dramatic shift in the purposes of American education, the locus of policy making for education, and



the processes by which education policy and practice are defined in this country. Fundamental policy questions, including movement toward a nationalized system of elementary and secondary education, are yet to be addressed in the National Goals for Education debate.

Additionally, the National Goals for Education present many daunting technical challenges to educators and the education system of the nation. One of the most important technical areas needing to be addressed involves the means by which progress toward the National Goals for Education will be assessed and measured. Experience in the development of useful education indicator systems suggests that under the current frenzied pace of the NGE movement, one must question whether all the necessary conceptual and technical issues will be adequately addressed in the evaluation of progress toward the National Goals for Education.

Beyond the practical considerations associated with the National Goals for Education, many significant research questions need to be addressed by scholars of education. The education research community needs to define the appropriate targets of reform efforts, especially since this important task has been overlooked by policy makers in the NGE process. The education research community must also articulate the need to incorporate theoretical perspectives into reform programs so results can be



better understood and explained. The education research community must also press the case for the dedication of adequate resources to the tasks of education improvement and study. Of course, many other questions associated with the National Goals for Education will challenge scholars and practitioners of education. However, proper understanding and organization of the task at the outset will enhance the likelihood of lasting education improvement.

That part of the education community perhaps most challenged by the National Goals for Education is and should be those who are involved in the preparation of educational leaders and scholarly inquiry into educational governance, management, and leadership. Unfortunately, the National Goals for Education appear to have been formulated and are being implemented with a minimum of involvement of the education community. On such a fundamental issue as defining and implementing goals for the nation's schools, the education community, through professional organizations such as the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, should insist upon and expect meaningful involvement at all levels of the NGE process. To do less is to abdicate the interests of the discipline in favor of leadership whose underlying motivations may have little to do with long-term, sustainable, meaningful education improvement. The National Goals for Education present the education community of this country a challenge of historic proportions to

demonstrate professional leadership.

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